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NEW LIGHT UPON THE FOUNDING
OF GEORGIA

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NEW LIGHT UPON THE FOUNDING OF GEORGIA.

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It has long been known that the first Earl of Egmont was a leader in promoting the colonization of Georgia, and that he wrote a journal of the trustees' meetings¹ which is much more detailed than the official record. In addition, a voluminous private diary of his is now being printed as a public document of the British government. The first volume of this, which has now appeared,² containing about one-third of the manuscript and covering the years from 1730 to 1733, supplements greatly the knowledge previously available upon a wide variety of English affairs in the period. It reports elaborately a number of debates in Parliament which the official records have given only in the most fragmentary form; it illustrates vividly the manoeuvring of the politicians great and small; it tells many curious things of life in royal and aristocratic circles; and it shows the author to have been a high-minded courtier as well as an ardent philanthropist, a music lover, a collector of engravings, and a devoted husband and father, yet enough of a gossip withal to establish him now as a very notable diarist. More to

1 This is extant only for the years from 1738 to 1744. It was first printed privately by G. W. J. DeRenne as one of the Wormsloe Quartos: *John, Earl of Egmont, A Journal of the Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America*. Wormsloe, 1886 (edition limited to 49 copies); and is now more generally accessible as volume five of the *Georgia Colonial Records*.

2. Historical Manuscripts Commission. *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont. Diary of Viscount Percival, afterward First Earl of Egmont*. Vol. 1, 1730-1733. Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty. London, 1920. pp. XIX, 477. price two shillings.

the present purpose, the book adds materially to the previously existing knowledge of the inception of the Georgia project and the launching of the colony. At the time the diary opens¹ the author, then bearing the title of Viscount Percival in the peerage of Ireland² was forty-seven years of age and in the midst of social, political and philanthropic affairs. Prompted, as he relates,³ by a desire to be of service to the new king, George II, he had procured election from a family borough to the English House of Commons; and he had served under Oglethorpe's chairmanship on the Parliamentary committee for investigating conditions in the English prisons. Furthermore he had long been an intimate friend of Dean Berkeley⁴ he had sought through years to establish a college in America; and he also was a member of a board of trustees who adopted the name "the Associates of the Late Dr. Bray" and continued Bray's own work in two lines, the establishment of local religious libraries and the conversion of negroes to Christianity.⁵

The first two entries in the diary concerning Georgia project are so significant as to call for quotation at some length. Under date of February 13, 1730:

I met Mr. Oglethorp [sic] who informed that he had found a very considerable charity, even fifteen thousand pounds, which lay in trustees' hands, and was like to have been lost because the heir of the testator being one of the trustees, refused to concur with the other two in any methods for disposing of the money, in hopes, as they were seventy years old each of them, they would soon die, and he should remain only surviving trustee, and then might apply it all to his own use. That the two old men were very honest and desirous to be discharged of their burthen, and had concurred with him to get the matter lodged in a Master of Chancery's hands till new trustees should be appointed to dispose thereof in a way that should be approved of by them in conjunction with the Lord Chancellor. That the heir of the testator had opposed this, and there had been a lawsuit thereupon, which Oglethorp had carried against the heir, who appeared

1. January 8, 1730. The diary was probably begun at an earlier time, but if so the preceding portions have not been preserved.

2. He was raised to the Earldom of Egmont, also in the Peerage of Ireland, in August, 1733.

3. Diary, p. 20. The pages of the diary will not be cited where the dates of its items are given in the text of this study.

4. Cf. Benjamin Rand, *Berkeley and Percival*. Cambridge, 1914.

5. Cf. An excellent brief study, "The Philanthropists and the Genesis of Georgia", by Professor Verner W. Crane of Brown University, in the *American Historical Review* XXVII, 63 (October, 1921). Those who became Georgia trustees included all the trustees of the Dalone will and all of the Bray associates. Indeed the Georgia board in its own sessions handled the affairs of the Dalone and Bray legacies until May 1733, when upon discovery that this was irregular, the three administrations were separated. (*Diary*, pp. 378-382).

against the decree; but my Lord Chancellor had confirmed it, and it was a pleasure to him to have been able in one year's time to be able at law to settle this affair. That the trustees had consented to this on condition that the trust should be annexed to some trusteeship already in being, and that being informed that I was a trustee for Mr. Dalone's legacy, who left about a thousand pounds to convert negroes, he had proposed to me and my associates as proper persons to be made trustees of this new affair; that the old gentleman approved of us, and he hoped I would accept it in conjunction with himself and several of our Committee of Gaols, as Mr. Towers, Mr. Hughes, Mr. Holland, Major Selwyn, and some other gentlemen of worth, as Mr Sloper and Mr. Vernon, Commissioner of the Excise. I told him it was a great pleasure to me to hear his great industry in recovering and securing so great a charity and to be joined with gentlemen whose worth I knew so well. . . . He then . . . said that he must tell me by the way, the old trustees of the fifteen thousand pounds would as yet allow but five thousand pounds to be under our management, which sum would answer the scheme; that the scheme is to procure a quantity of acres either from the Government or by gift or purchase in the West Indies, and to plant thereon a hundred miserable wretches who being let out of gaol by the last year's Act are, are now starving about the town for want of employment: that they should be settled all together by way of colony, and be subject to subordinate rulers, who should inspect their behaviour, and labour under one chief head; that in time they with their families would increase so fast as to become a security and defense of our possessions against the French and Indians of those parts; that they should be employed in cultivating flax and hemp, which being allowed to make into yarn, would be returned to England and Ireland, and greatly promote our manufactures. All which I approved.

Next under date of April I the following:

I called on Mr. Oglethorp, who kept me three hours and more explaining his project of sending a colony of poor and industrious debtors to the West Indies. . . . Our business is to get a Patent or Charter for incorporating a number of honest and reputable persons to pursue this good work. Mr. Oglethorpe told me that the number relieved by the last year's Act out of prison for debt are ten thousand, and that three hundred are returned to take the benefit thereof from Prussia, many of whom are woolen manufacturers.

These items go far toward extinguishing all possible doubts that the Georgia project originated in Oglethorpe's mind.¹ They indicate very strongly, in fact, that the plan was framed in all essentials before he communicated it to those who were to be his fellow trustees. Oglethorpe's account to Percival implies furthermore that it was the discovery of this fund, which had been bequeathed by "one King, a haberdasher" for unspecified charitable uses which

1. As to these doubts, see James P. McCain, *Georgia as a Proprietary Province*, pp. 60, 61.

suggested to Oglethorpe the thought of a charitable colony. The distresses of unemployment among the liberated debtor-prisoners, however, were doubtless already a matter of concern to him.

Incidentally it should be noted in connection with the passages quoted above, that the term "West Indies" was in those times often used to include the continent as well as the islands; and Oglethorpe's allusion to the protection of the English "possessions in those parts" against the French and Indians suggests an intention of a continental location from the first. Many times afterward the diary names "Carolina" as the intended location, and curiously it does not mention "Georgia" until May, 1732, the month following the signature of the charter by the king. The reason was that no name was adopted for the colony until many months after the inception of the project. Some of the chronology in the premises may be gathered from the proceedings of the Privy Council which have somewhat recently been published for this period.¹ It there appears that the first name proposed by the petitioners for themselves was "the Corporation for Establishing Charitable Colonys in America"; and the name "Georgia" does not occur until December 14, 1731.

The course of events concerning the charter itself may be traced from Percival's diary and the Acts of the Privy Council in combination. On July 30, 1730, Percival records: "we agreed on a petition to the King and Council for obtaining a grant of lands on the south-west of Carolina for settling poor persons of London, and having ordered it to be engrossed fair, we signed it, all who were present, and the other Associates were to be spoke also to sign it before delivered." This petition for a grant of land and a charter of incorporation was considered by the Privy Council on September 17, 1730, and was referred to a committee which in turn referred it, November 13, to the Board of Trade. In the report which this board promptly made, the

1. *Acts of the Privy Council of England Colonial Series. Vol. III, A. D. 1720-1735.* Hereford: Printed for His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1910. Price ten shillings. The proceedings in regard to the charter of Georgia are recorded in pages 299-305.

intending trustees found some objectionable details; and on January 12, 1731, the committee of the Privy Council referred it back to the Board of Trade along with proposed alterations, which concerned chiefly the power of appointing and removing civil and military officers in the colony. The board then consented to the vesting of this power in the trustees, and cordially recommended the incorporation of the petitioners and the grant to them of the land lying between the Savannah and "Alatamaha" rivers. The committee of the Privy Council endorsed this on November 18, and advised that the Attorney and Solicitor General be directed to prepare a draft of a charter accordingly; and on January 28 the Privy Council adopted this recommendation of its committee. When in the following June, however, the petitioners were informed of the terms of the charter as it came from the hands of the Attorney General, they were dissatisfied with its provisions concerning the terms of the councillors in office, the control of militia, and taxes on import and export trade.¹ The summer dispersion presumably prevented a meeting of of the associates until September 7, when they determined to present arguments against the objectionable features. In November Oglethorpe had hopes of procuring a satisfactory revision; but when on January 19, 1732, the Privy Council's committee on "Plantation Affairs" voted in Percival's presence to approve the draft of the Charter, not all the changes requested had been made. Percival adds to his laconic relation of this episode: "and we concerned therein acquiesced in their pleasure, though against the grain."

All that now remained, it was thought, was mere formality; and, putting vigorous pressure upon the crown officials, the trustees expected a speedy issue. But the lapse of a month without decisive action brought a crisis. Percival wrote on February 18: "Perceiving an unaccountable delay in the putting his Majesty's seal to the Carolina charter, . . . all our gentlemen concerned as trustees are much

1. *Diary* p. 198

out of humor, and some are for flinging it up." Both he and Oglethorpe now made stringent protests and inquiries in high circles, which yielded the information, February 25, that the obstruction came from the king himself on the ground that the charter did not reserve the appointment of militia officers to the crown. At a meeting hastily summoned, the petitioners resolved not to accept a revision in this regard, for fear that it would cause the colony to be burdened with expensive placemen and impede the administration of government. By much running to and fro in the next few days the influence of the chief ministers was enlisted on their side; and the king, having yielded his objection, put his fiat upon the charter on January 26, and formally signed it on April 21, 1732.¹

The pressing problem now became that of finance. As to the bequest of King, the haberdasher, one of its trustees had long since developed doubts that the Georgia project was consonant with the testator's intentions; and apparently the Georgia trust never procured any part of that fund. On the other hand the estimate of expense had not shrunk. Percival wrote, April 23, 1732: "Captain Coram, who knew the West Indies well, had declared to me that we could not set out under 12,000 *l.* Mr. La Roche agreed we could not under 10,000*l.* I said that was too little, for every family will stand us in 100 *l.* at 20*l.* a head the bare fitting out with tools, clothes and transporting; besides which we were to maintain them in provisions a year when arrived, to build houses etc., and to erect a sort of fort, etc."² In default of any prospect of copious funds from private subscriptions, concerning which preliminary steps had long since been taken, the thoughts of the trustees were turning to the public treasury. They now

1. *Diary*, p. 260. The official date of the charter is June 9, but this merely marks the completion of routine procedure, the affixing of the seal. In the interim the trustees had expressed their thanks to the chief officers of state for the granting of the charter and proceeded to business as a virtually constituted body, though their first formal session was not held until July 20.

2. In the next month Lord Carteret, the veteran proprietor of the province of Carolina expressed the opinion to Percival that the first settlement should be begun with not less than a thousand persons, with resources of not less than £20,000 (*Diary*, p. 278).

devised a scheme of considerable adroitness. Having previously procured the approval of Walpole and the King, they caused petitions to be presented in the House of Commons, May 12, from residents of Westminster, Southwark and other localities in and about London, "complaining of the the great abuses and mischief arising from vagrants and beggars who have no settlement. It was intended by Mr. Oglethorp and the other gentlemen concerned in the new intended settlement of colonies in South Carolina to ground thereupon a motion for addressing the King to grant 10,000 *l.* to us for transporting those vagrants and beggars under the age of sixteen to South Carolina, and bind them to masters we should send over; but an unexpected opposition arose against us," which balked the plan for that year.

On May 10, 1733, the question was revived in Parliament by a petition from the Georgia trustees. After Sir Robert Walpole had announced that the king had no objection to the granting of funds in aid of the colony, Sir Joseph Jekyl, Sir John Barnard, Horace Walpole and Colonel Bladen, as well as Oglethorpe and Percival, spoke in favor of a grant. On the other side Mr. Whitworth spoke against the giving of public money, and also Mr. Winnington who said "Our views of raising wine or silk or potashes might not answer, and we should buy our experience too dear." As to Whitworth's opposition, Percival confided to his diary: "I did not wonder at it, for he told me this morning that he was against enlarging our colonies, and wished New England at the bottom of the sea." The opponents were too few to prevent the prompt appropriation of £10,000.

Meanwhile, in October, 1732, although only £2000 had been procured in subscriptions,¹ the trustees resolved to plant the settlement. This resolution was against Percival's judgment; but Oglethorpe's decision to conduct the expedition in person diminished his apprehensions.² The

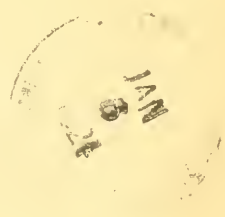
1. These included £600 from directors of the East India Company, £300 from the directors of the Bank of England, and £300 from the trustees of the Earl of Thanet's legacy (*Diary*, p. 392).

2. *Diary*, p. 293.

chief concern of the trustees now became the selection of persons to be sent "on the charity", the granting of lands, and the framing of laws. In these premises and in Georgia affairs in general after the summer of 1733, the diary adds little to previous knowledge; for on the one hand the official journal of the trustees embodies all important data, and on the other hand Percival had his interest now distracted for many months by other matters. There are nevertheless in the diary, early and late, many more Georgia items than have here been noted; and no future research may neglect the scanning of its every page.

Presented by
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